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# **SOCIAL POWERS**

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# SOCIAL POWERS

THREE POPULAR LECTURES  
ON THE ENVIRONMENT, THE PRESS  
AND THE PULPIT

BY

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GLASGOW

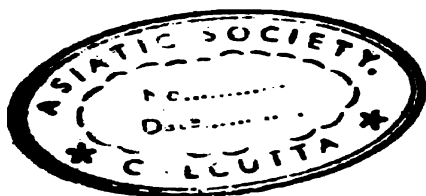
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TO  
MY FRIEND  
JAMES MURRAY SMITH



## PREFACE

THE address on "Man and his Environment" was the closing lecture for the Winter Session of 1912-1913 of the series given in connection with the Public Libraries of Glasgow, and was the first delivered in the new Mitchell Library.

The address on "Journalism and Citizenship" was delivered to the Glasgow District of the Institute of Journalists, and that on "Are Moral and Religious Beliefs capable of Proof?" was given in Manchester as one of the Deansgate lectures.

The three lectures have one purpose : it is to help plain men to realize the significance of the invisible world of moral and social and religious facts, by which they live ; and to induce a fuller use of earnest thought upon them.

THE UNIVERSITY,  
GLASGOW, *April*, 1913.



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# MAN AND HIS ENVIRONMENT





## MAN AND HIS ENVIRONMENT

*"The truth is that the knowledge of external nature and the sciences which that knowledge requires or includes are not the great or the frequent business of the human mind. . . . We are perpetually moralists; we are geometricians only by chance."*

DR. JOHNSON.

IF I were asked to say what period in the life of a man or of a nation is to be called the most happy, I should answer: it is when outer circumstance and inner mood conspire together to send them forth upon a great enterprise. It is a law of life, whether on the small scale of a single person or on the large scale of a whole people, that to gain itself it must devote its self. The currents of the world of spirit, that is, of the world of mind, are like those of the open seas; however wide their sweep, they return in the end upon themselves.

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And I am tempted to add that the wider the sweep of our purposes the wiser they are. It is not the man who seeks near ends who makes his life significant : not even though he reaches these ends.

“ Greedy for quick returns of profit, sure  
Bad is our bargain.”

It was not the ancient ships which crept along the coasts, but those which spread their wings and sailed out into the open ocean and sought strange shores which came to port laden with strange merchandise—symbols of life's venture in all but one respect, namely, that while the ship might come home empty, or be lost in mid-ocean, the rational soul seeking a great purpose is never lost, but gains all the way ; for the pursuit itself is prosperity and the voyage is its own reward.

Now, when we look around us and observe the innumerable activities of ourselves and our neighbours—all of their purposes personal, even when they are not selfish—and when we witness how these activities combine and clash, and recombine to clash again in endless ways,

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it might seem an idle and impossible task to attempt to catch the purpose and the main direction of a nation's life as a whole. It is not the picture of united Argosies sailing together under one leadership that arises before our minds, but that of a vast number of little vessels, scattered over the surface of the deep, steering amidst tossing waves in every variety of direction, and few of them guided by the fixed and distant stars.

Nevertheless the first picture is the more true. If we take a wide view of the life of the nations, and contemplate their destiny over a great expanse of time, we shall find that singly, nay in groups, they are borne along together as if carried onward by deep ocean currents, and, without knowing it, are fulfilling the hidden purposes of an eternal mind, and moving in one direction.

For many successive centuries the nations destined to be civilized, and for that reason to survive, were engaged in liberating the individual units which composed them, from the crushing power of their environment—from the

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immediate pressure of natural wants and the despotism of the social tyrants. The richest member of the crude community had no store for the morrow and no defence against the aggression of his fellows, except the physical strength and craft which could make him successful in the chase and battle. It was most gradually that these natural necessities were pressed back, and space was cleared for a little personal freedom, and the narrow horizon, as in the thickness of a wide forest, was a little widened; and this was done only for and by the few. Numberless centuries more had to arise and come forth into the light of day and flow past into the darkness, before the right to be free, if he could, was proclaimed as the natural right of man; and the task of making good that right is even yet being only slowly realized.

Even yet, late as it is in the day, the very idea of freedom is only partially understood. There is an aspect of freedom which man is always prone to overlook, and a condition of it which he does not consciously endeavour to

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secure. He has taken freedom to mean nothing but emancipation. He has been engaged in breaking the rivets of the chains which bound him to the will of the powerful. He has not realized that the greater task still remains to be done. After the chains have been removed, he has to teach his benumbed limbs to walk. Having gained his right to freedom, he must learn how to use it. Led out into the open air, a prisoner set at liberty, he has to accustom his eyes to the light of day, guess the purposes which he should pursue, and the quarter of the heavens towards which he must move in order to gain the good of life. And *this* lesson the wisest of mankind has only begun to learn. We are still children in school, blundering with the alphabet of the moral life.

But we have begun to learn this new lesson: and we are trying to spell out the meaning of the positive aspect of personal freedom. Quite recently, I may say "Just yesterday" when I think of the long course of man's career, his history has taken a new trend. We are no longer engaged solely, or even mainly, in affirm-

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ing the abstract right to be free, or fortifying the individual within the citadel of his private personality, bidding him hold it against the powers of the outer world, natural and social.

We are beginning to interpret the world in which man, as an individual and apparently separate personality maintains his life, not as a hindrance to his freedom or as the enemy of his private good, but as the means whereby these may be attained. The world is an enemy only when it is misunderstood and misused. It obstructs the ignorant mind and frustrates and reproves the perverse will; but for the mind that is awake and alive, and the heart that is made wise unto goodness, it is a vast, rich inheritance waiting to be entered upon and possessed. Man has but to learn the true proportion of things, distinguishing great things and lasting things from the small, and he will find the truth declared by the Man of Sorrows, who was the greatest optimist the world ever knew, to be valid for all thought and all practice—"Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven, and all these things shall be added unto you." The

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natural world is the instrument of moral issues, and the universe a place for the making of souls. If man's environment baffles, hinders, frustrates and ultimately defeats him, so that his whole career looks an empty thing of less than no account and ends in darkness, it is because that environment has been misinterpreted and misemployed by him and his fellows.

The theoretical recognition of this truth we owe to reflective thinkers: the practical adaptation of this view of the relation between man and his environment we owe, as a society or a nation, in great part to the medical profession. These benevolent tyrants of modern life, whom neither party in politics and no class rich or poor in society can withstand without misgiving, have taught us the significance of the environment for our physical health and well-being. If we are slow to obey their behests, we do not dispute the truth of the laws which they announce. We know with certainty that the worst and the most poisonous environment comes from man's corruption of it, and that if the earth and air are not our helpmates unto health, it is because



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our intercourse with them is not direct and pure. We have allowed the city to become a place of slums, and thousands of its inhabitants to spend their days in their recesses. But in this respect the public intelligence is awake and the public conscience is alive; and the great cities, our own amongst them, are out for a great enterprise and will not count the cost.

Now, in what I have to say to-night, I have no other purpose than to widen this view of the relation between man and his surroundings, so that the effort towards purity and health may be continued upward and onward in still higher spheres of public well-being.

Physical health is a great matter. It is the condition, as I need not tell you, of man's prosperity in almost every domain. Indeed I know of only one exception, and even that exception holds only within strict limitations. The ill-health of life-long invalids at times seems to be capable of being converted into means of a wistful patience of spirit, a nun-like unstainedness of soul, bringing with them a secure triumph and a great peace like that of

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the sea sleeping in the moonlight. But this exception is instructive. It proves just what I want you to believe, namely, that though physical health is an indispensable condition of a nation's welfare, it is not the sole condition. Nay, there is a respect in which it is not ultimate but secondary, not a cause but a consequence. When the great profession of medicine, aided by our wiser governors in the large cities and in the State, set themselves to improve the conditions of the nation's well-being, they appealed to the nation's mind. The way they went about their work is a confession that mind is the master element, that if we know the truth and accept its guidance, recognize the laws of life and follow them, the right use of the environment will come as a matter of course. There can be no advance in any direction, and no security anywhere except in the right attitude of mind towards the world which is around us.

I should find it difficult to indicate a greater work, more patiently pursued from year to year, or more persistently striven for, against the

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obstruction of ill-informed and often selfish interests in many a corner of the land, than this work of producing the right attitude of the public mind towards its physical environment.

But, ladies and gentlemen, there is another environment than the physical: an environment whose presence and power and significance we have hardly begun to realize. It is not an environment which we can see or touch ; but is in all strictness intangible, invisible, inaudible, the object of none of the senses. Nevertheless it means more and counts more for us than any other. It wraps us around more closely, presses upon us more nearly, enters into us more intimately. It occupies the very seat of the intelligence and will, and passes into their structure. Indeed, it is the closeness of its relation to ourselves which has obscured its presence from us. Its action upon us is so constant, and its influence upon us penetrates with such subtlety into the very constitution of our minds, that we do not distinguish between its control of us and our own activities. Hence we do not think about it. If the environment of man is men-

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tioned, our minds turn at once to the physical cosmos, and the changes therein wrought by man as he tills the earth and builds his cities, and makes and distributes material goods. If we speak of natural law, or of the scheme of things as obstructing or favouring our purposes and limiting or enlarging our liberty, we assume as a matter of course that the law is physical and the scheme material. We think that we are in immediate contact with them, and do not dream that what we call "the world we live in" is a world within another world—that it is enveloped in an invisible medium, from which alone it draws its meaning and value.

But a little reflexion will show us that civilized man is never in direct contact with Nature. The physical scheme never lays its bare, rough hand upon his flesh and soul. A merciful medium intervenes and moderates the harshness of its touch. Even the lowest sample of civilization, the *unemployable*, whether he lives in luxury or goes about in looped and windowed raggedness, eating his crust of bread, finds this medium beneficent. Provision is

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made for him by the mind and will of his fellowmen, even though they never may have sought his good, any more than he has sought theirs. Their organized activities, which constitute and sustain society, have produced the luxuries of the rich who do not toil, and they also have baked the beggar's bread, and woven his rags, and built the road on which he tramps.

I cannot deny and I do not desire to minimize the significance of the natural scheme which we usually regard as our only environment. What we call the physical cosmos is in all probability not merely the foundation of things that are higher, but the power which manifests itself in them, and man's spiritual attainments, even society itself, are its outcome. But I doubt if any of us have in truth ever known such a natural scheme—a scheme out of relation to and unaffected by the human medium. Such a scheme is in truth only a fragment of what is real; a thing robbed of its nobler features, a corpse, "an empty eye-socket," a blind necessity, barren and harsh and hard. It is not in truth the world we live

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in, or our real environment. The real world is the world that has brought man about, and evolved into a higher scheme and nobler system, the system of inter-related minds and wills, which we call Human Society. It is only when we thus take the scheme in all its compass, and bear in mind what it has become, and interpret its first stages in the reflected light of its highest attainments that we know what it really is.

Organized society is the means of all our knowing and the impelling power of all our doing. What is it in the last resort that distinguishes between a wealthy man's command of the wide world's commodities to-day and the shivering, hunger-haunted nakedness of the lake-dweller; or between the low-browed, half-animal cunning, the crude and cruel passions of the cave man, and the soul which wears righteousness as a robe and intelligence as a diadem, and which is sensitive to the beauty and meaning of the world, and devoted to its good? What is it that has intervened, except the continuous, ever-recreated "Mortal

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God," which we call "Human Society"? We who are its temporary manifestations and evanescent foci, the minute cells of its vast organism, bearing its life within us and possessing nothing which we have not borrowed—whose language do we speak except its language? What customs, what manners, what morals, what religion do we possess, except those of our own people? It is the Society within which we were born, on whose knees we have been nursed, and "whose breasts we have suckled," that has made us human. It first broke the slumber of the soul, awakened its wants, and sent it on its way aspiring and learning the nature of the good it needs. And by a dual process it forms us, and we form it at the same time. We are makers of the social world, which itself makes us. There is a borrowing and lending of life on both sides, and the marvel and miracle never cease.

We have been taught to believe that the structure of our physical organism is the result of a process of evolution, maintaining itself unbroken through stages which no man can

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number, and over an expanse of time which we cannot measure : so great has been the task of making ready the dwelling-place of mind. But even more marvellous is the process of the evolution which has led man, free in a sense all the way and yet guided by a necessity which cannot err, to interlace his mind and will with those of his fellows, and by interlacing them to form them so as to bring forth, at first a weak and timid birth, and then to foster into growth and multitudinous might that larger being, that wiser, less mortal living thing which we call Civilized Society. .

But what is Society, you ask, except the men and women and the children who compose it? What does it do, over above that which they do? And what are its mighty deeds, except the many little deeds of many little creatures, each of them interested for a little while in little things? Human Society is by itself what the coral reef would be without the coral insect—a mere name.

I agree : human society, apart from the units which compose it, is naught but an empty



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generic term. But, on the other hand, if, while remembering this truth, you overlook its complement, and think of men and women as existing apart and unrelated, each of them isolated within the recesses of his own personality; or, if you think of society as the mere aggregate of such beings, you are once more using words without meaning. The living body is made up of atoms; but the atoms are not discrete, and the body is not a mere collection of them. There is not one of the atoms that does not borrow its structure, its function, and its very being from its relation to the others and to the whole. They *are* through it and it *is* only through them. We can comprehend neither the one nor the other if we do not regard them in their living interrelation. It is not otherwise with the units which compose human society. It is only in union with his fellows that man has any meaning or any might. It is in intercommunion that his soul is born, and the relations in which he stands to his fellows are the qualities and powers of his own spirit.

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We recognize this truth in an inadequate and, I must add, in a distorted way when we enter upon the idle discussion as to how far man is dependent upon his environment, and try to delimit the extent of the territory that he can reserve for his own liberty. There is no such empty territory, and if there were man would not be free in it, but helpless. The most stiff-necked of the exponents of a will which is supposed to move *in vacuo* will admit that man is not beyond the influence of his environment. He would not expect a batch of Scottish infants, brought up amongst the head-hunters of Central Africa, to grow up into Presbyterian ministers, or merchant princes, or even into politicians. Somehow or another the medium within which a man lives, the *spcial* medium, penetrates into him. Nay, we must go further and admit more. There is nothing within him that is not saturated with this medium. He owes everything that he has and is, every shred and fibre, jot and tittle of his experience to it; and his living experience is his living self. His experience is his environment converted into

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rational tissue, just as his body is made up in every part, through and through, of the natural elements which have been assimilated from the world without. We literally owe our soul to our environment, and apart from it are nothing but empty forms.

But, on the other hand, the environment, whether natural or social, owes all its spiritual significance and worth to our own selves. For unless the soul seizes, appropriates, assimilates, and in that sense recreates the medium in which it exists, the pressure of the environment around it will have as little meaning and reality for it as have the waves that break in thunder around the coasts of a rock-bound island in mid-ocean. His spirit must borrow, but it must also translate. The real world must give, but the soul must transmute. We cannot sever these two powers without destroying them, nor sunder their functions without arresting their activity.

We must, in fact, take man and his environment as we find them ; and we never find them except as interacting elements of one whole, which is neither abstract matter nor abstract

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spirit, but spirit clothed with a living body, and nature instinct with life and soul. It is well that we should distinguish and analyse into elements—it is only so that we can know ; but it is not well that we should forget that as we begin with the whole when we analyse, so we must end with the whole, synthesizing the parts once more and restoring the unity which we have sundered.

There is perhaps no deeper intellectual or even moral and religious need of the time than the need of a new and higher synthesis. The sciences divide the nature of things into aspects, and give themselves severally to the interpretation of these as if they existed separately. The functions of Society are, in like manner, divided and distributed amongst its members so that men tend to become specialized organs of special social ends, ministers of one-sided interests which all too readily come into conflict with one another.

Art, religion, philosophy, whose main mission is to bear witness to the wholeness of life and the harmonious integrity of its fundamental

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aims, have at no time found their task either so difficult or so momentous. Finite ends have so enlarged their scope, as the deeper meaning and richer complexity of the world are being revealed, that we are prone to seek in them our final satisfaction, and to forget the true ends of our humanity, which are always more than finite.

But although analysis leads towards truth, it is the richer synthesis which it summons to succeed it that most fully attains the truth. Chemistry sunders the elements of things, but to know what these elements verily are, and can become and do, it must bring them together again. It is when oxygen and hydrogen unite, and when the elements of an explosive are fused by a spark or shock, that the dormant force which is in them is liberated.

In all departments of knowledge and practice we are prone to convert the elements which we distinguish within a whole into stubborn opposites, and to find the problem of bringing them together again insoluble. And the most obstinate of all these dualisms is that which we

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set up between nature and spirit, or between man as a rational free being and his environment. But nature divorced from spirit has no meaning, and spirit divorced from nature has no content. The world has neither form nor beauty unless there is a mind which can elicit them, although the mind of itself could not take one step towards inventing them.

Let me illustrate this matter by a simple example. Physical science tells us that the material conditions of sound are waves, which in themselves are invisible and inaudible. Physiologists will tell us further that these waves excite the auditory nervous centres of our organism. But this excitation also is absolutely inaudible. If the material world contained nothing except these physical and physiological phenomena it would be forever the realm of silence. But let us bring in the missing factor, the living soul that can hear and enjoy. What follows? It is that the otherwise silent world, making use of the soul, reveals in itself a quality the existence of which would never otherwise have been known. The natural world operating through

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the medium of the musician's soul breaks forth into the miracle and marvel of harmonious sounds.

It is in like manner that the beauty of form and colour is born. It is not the product of mere matter, nor the creation of mere mind. It is the result of a conjoint activity, of nature expressing itself through the medium of the artist's soul. Beauty is the offspring of a double parentage, and it carries within traits from both sides. It is natural and spiritual too.

Now the same truth holds of man's soul in all its functions, and of man's environment in all its compass. Both man and his environment enter into every function and are present in every attainment of the mind. What do we conclude then? Evidently, that the environment is not *natural* in the sense of being opposed to mental, as dead or mechanical: this were only a half truth. Its natural character is only one of its aspects. Nor is it mind-made, as the old Idealists used to say; its mental nature is also only one of its aspects. These in themselves are nothing but abstractions, dead

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and helpless. That which verily is, is greater than either, because it is both of them in one. The world in which man lives is a world of which he is a part and manifestation. It is a natural scheme which comes into consciousness in man, and is therefore found to be suffused with meaning and alive with purpose. It reveals its full character and powers only in the ideal activities of the finite souls in which it emerges. It is only in the light of these activities, in the activities of minds and wills, which beyond doubt are natural products, that we discover that what we call Nature is a being which has gone out upon a spiritual adventure.

Nor are the conditions of the success of that adventure fulfilled by the evolution of single minds or merely exclusive personalities. Single minds in their separateness are incapable of spiritual attainment; they can neither find the truth nor pursue the good, nor know the need of them. But nature has provided that minds and wills shall intertwine their powers, and live and grow by means of one another, like the living leaves of a living tree.



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She has evolved human society and has endowed it with a multitudinous yet single rational life, which beats like a pulse in all its members. For Society is a real, though as yet an imperfect and inharmonious whole. It has a continuous history in the past, and a direction and destiny in the future which are one and its own, and greater far than those of any of its parts. And it is in the light of this higher power that man's environment, natural and social, stands forth as his helpmate in the adventure of truth and goodness and power.

Now, this conception of the continuity of nature and spirit is, I believe, destined to take a deep hold of modern thought. And the consequences which must issue from it are great. When the light of the highest forms which the natural universe has achieved is thrown back upon the lower, do you think the universe can be still called crass or material? We shall rather know, as Wordsworth did, that

"The mighty being is awake."

And man, on his part, recognizing his natural descent from the natural cosmos, and that his

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very mind and soul are Nature's child, will go forth on the adventure of knowledge and rectitude and all loving-kindness with a larger hope. No longer will he seem to be required to save his soul in despite of the nature of things. He must save it *because* of the nature of things.

What, indeed, in the last resort, has been taking place in the long past, except that Nature, having equipped man with the promise of a rational nature, has helped him to realize that promise by yielding him more and more of her own meaning and use? And "Society" is also her invention; for she has planted so deeply in the nature of the children of men their need of one another, that, as the wise tell us, Society is logically, or by intrinsic necessity, prior to the individual. We cannot find its beginning because Society is always *at* the beginning. The bond which holds its primitive parts together are originally light and loose; there is both little liberty on the part of members and little loyalty to one another and to the whole. Primitive societies are small and have

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little power, and they are easily dissipated. But, as contrasted with the individual, Society has a continuous life, and it can grow. It garners the results of the intercourse of men with Nature and with one another from age to age, and the inheritance of the later generation is ever richer than the inheritance of that which went before. It branches forth into new powers ; its individuality becomes more intense, and its reach wider. Experience grows apace, and writes its own record in the Fine Arts, in the Sciences, in reflective thought, in morality, in social and civic, in industrial and commercial institutions, and in religious devotion to the Best, which can elevate and consecrate them all.

But that record has to be read, my friends, and read much more carefully, and pondered upon much more profoundly than we have hitherto striven to do. The meaning of the experience of mankind as it has gradually built up its own soul through its co-partnery with the natural scheme has to be distilled from its history. It is not enough that the mind of

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the world should look back upon the way it has travelled merely to mark and recall the events of its long journey. It must endeavour to catch the main direction of its movement, and, so far as it is possible, guess the purpose and the laws which guided it. "Evolution," it has been said, "is always blind." It is perhaps more true that it can only see when it looks backwards. But, by help of what it sees, it can guess at its goal in the future. It cannot know, but it can divine the nature of the good it must pursue from the path it has already trodden. . We cannot forecast with certainty what will come next in our own career, because we never completely are what it is in our power to become, nor do we fully comprehend ourselves.

But, on the other hand, the evolution of this greatest thing in the world, namely Civilized Society, is not a matter given up to chaos and contingency. It is not the blind hand of mere accident that has constructed this noble, living, immortal temple. Law reigns and purpose rules. And to understand something of that

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law, and catch some glimpse of that purpose, is surely the greatest task to which man can set his hand.

Hitherto we have been intent on interpreting the world as physical. And the gain has been very great. No man can measure our debt to the physical sciences, or foretell the value of the discoveries by which man is gaining control of the natural processes and harnessing them to his will. But, much as we have learnt from the natural sciences, we are only like children in a Dame's School who have learnt to spell and cannot read. The sciences break up nature's meanings as children break up sentences into words, sounds into syllables. We have not synthesized nature's laws and found how they unite their significance and power in the spirit-woven realm of the social order, where mind holds by mind and will by will. The might of this master-power in the world has well nigh escaped our notice; or, if we have caught glimpses of it, we have passed on without seeking to enquire. We know that from time to time deep changes pass over the spirit of a

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whole people. The main current of a nation's life takes new turns, and all men, wise and foolish, sage and simple, great and little, rich and poor are swept along in new directions. Policies once wise become first obsolete, and then obstructive, and finally mischievous. But there is none to tell us why. We do not understand the social forces, and we cannot control them. We confront the future without having learnt the meaning of the past, and the tasks of the present find us all unprepared.

What can we expect under such circumstances except confusion of mind and conflict of purposes, and good men, unselfishly seeking to serve their age in ways that nature must defeat? Some of us resist change in social thought and practice although their uses are already done ; and others of us, taking truth for error and error for truth, seek the social good in directions in which the good is not to be found. We agree in nothing except in our passionate confidence in our own convictions and our passionate antagonism to one another's outlook ; and in unwillingness to institute enquiry if we are not persuaded that the

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enquirer already entertains our own opinions, and is ready to sign the confession of our own social creed.

But the spirit of enquiry in this region, too, is abroad. We are driven to enquire by the tragical collision of the vast interests of modern society. And my successor in the University will not be compelled to plead with his fellow-citizens, as I have been called to plead, for some exiguous equipment in its seat of learning for that patient, dispassionate research conducted by many minds, which alone can lead to knowledge of the nature of the master-power in this world of ours, and, instead of conflict and its wasteful ways, bring the peace and the strength of a social will in harmony with itself.

## JOURNALISM AND CITIZENSHIP





## JOURNALISM AND CITIZENSHIP

*"Journalism is to modern Europe what political oratory was to Athens and Rome ; and to become what it ought, it should be wielded by the same sort of men."* J. S. MILL.

EVERY age of the world is, in its own eyes, new. Human affairs, to those who are in the midst of them, are always at a crisis. The momentous choice has now, at last, to be made. The nation is at the parting of the ways, and its destiny is waiting upon its decision. Matters have proceeded to such lengths in ways of evil, according to some, that change is imperative ; the tide of its fortune, according to others, is in such full flood that it must take it now, or "lose its venture." "Animosity between classes, imprudence in finance, unscrupulousness in political methods have reached their limits : the nation must either rise in wrath against the

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perpetrators of these evils or perish; and the moment to rise is *now*." "The spirit of the times is awake at last to its responsibilities; it is touched with sympathy for the toiling multitudes, stirred by fair ideals, resolved on securing to every man and woman in the nation the opportunity for a more healthy and more secure life of soul and body, and circumstances so conspire with this high mood of the national mind that now, at last, the world's good day is going to dawn." "The times are so bad that we must change them, and change them now." "The times are so good, so full of promise, that now is the very apex of our national opportunity."

Are not these the things that you, gentlemen of the press, are week in, week out, shouting more or less loudly in our ears? You echo the words and record the deeds that stir the nation's blood; and sometimes, they say, you clothe little things with greatness, and deck the commonplace with marvel rather than let the people fall asleep. And if your readers, on their part, complain day after day that "there is nothing

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in the papers," yet our hope springs up eternally, and we turn to your sheets every morning with as much eagerness as to our breakfast rolls.

Now, I commend you for this—if I may make so bold. Circumstances verily are always new, for humanity is always moving along an untrodden path into new scenery; and even if circumstances were not new, the minds that strive to comprehend and control them have in them an alchemy that makes them new. ~~Cir-~~ cumstances are stale, and the world is old only to the life that is on the wane. The season is always at the spring for the young; and there is fresh enterprise every morning for the will that is alive with vigour.

The news-bearers of the world—and to bear news was the original, and is still the primary function of the daily press—are amongst the greatest of its ill-requited benefactors. You reflect the world's youth; to whom life is full of incident and interest, and renew that youth from day to day. You help to keep us alive and expectant, as you watch for us the gradual

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weaving of man's destiny on the loom of time.

But although every age calls itself an age of transition, and our journalistic press, like a lively showman, stands on its hustings and cries: "Just begin, just begin, just begin, just now!" the long, slow, revolving year of a nation's life is not unchanging. It has its winter season, when its social forces seem to sleep and it is unconscious of the way its powers are being nursed so as to be ready to break forth in new adventure. One age ploughs and sows the seed, and it is another age which sees the yellowing corn and garners it. All the ages have their part to play, and all the parts are necessary; but they are not all the same. Some transitions are more significant than others, and not all crises have the same magnitude. Which moment in a nation's life you would call greatest depends much on your make of mind. To some of us the great moment is that when a new idea is born; to others, when the potent will appears which can carry the idea out into action. Naturally, per-

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haps, I lean to the former view : the discoverer to me means more than the inventor, and the volitions of the latter seem to be nothing but the ideas of the former breaking out into their necessary consequences. And yet, one is not wise if one looks for *first* causes in human history. Its web is too continuous, and there are far too many threads in the pattern. The new idea, parent of the new enterprise, and the great thinker who possesses and is possessed by the new idea, are both alike results. Some change of mood in the people's spirit, which is itself the result of multitudinous little thoughts and little deeds, has brought them about. It is impossible in this region of mind and will to cry "Lo here!" or "Lo there!" with decisive confidence.

The ways in which mankind builds up its destiny are very strange. Neither the true nor the good which, I believe, it always pursues in the last resort—for no man yet has *desired* to take error for truth, or is moved to act except by what seems, in some more or less foolish sense, to be good—is known to us at any time except dimly. We have to define our ideals as

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we move. If we read men's lives with the insight born of sympathy, we shall find them to be

"Like plants in mines which never saw the sun,  
But dream of him, and guess where he may be,  
And do their best to climb and get to him."

Man, I say, has to make his ideals as he moves. His conscience, by which he recognizes the good, is in school, as well as the will to follow it. And he can learn only one lesson ~~at a time~~. It is but one aspect of a great truth or a great practical good that an age recognizes, and all the ideals of mankind are one-sided. History is the process of correcting abstractions, and of making indefinite ideas concrete and full of content. It is always turning back for some forgotten aspect of the good. And every new age is seeking social ends which are at once new and old—old as implicit, latent, silently potential; new in their explicit expression and active effectiveness. Your newest socialisms, for instance, and every fresh aspiration of every class, including even the demand for "Votes for women," are as old as the times when

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'Aspasia' ruled Pericles and Pericles ruled Athens, and Plato wrote his *Republic*.

And, on the other hand, the Individualism, which many think, and probably think rightly, has been on the wane ever since the days of John Stuart Mill, will return again, nay, must return again, if Socialism is to issue in the harmony, not of slaves nor of children, but of men.

Yet the movement of a nation's life is not a foolish alternation; and mankind is not the shuttle-cock struck to and fro in a game of impish gods. Human society, the most immortal being in this world, is a growing experience, alive in every part. It returns enriched from every one-sided excursion. It assimilates its past into its present, like everything that lives. It is throwing out new powers; it goes out to meet new responsibilities; and its tasks wax with its strength. The powers and the responsibilities, the tasks and the opportunities of later ages, differ from those of the earlier as those of the grown-up man from the child's amongst his toys.



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The momentousness of a growing nation's choice becomes thus greater. It can seek wider truth and fall into worse error. It can sin more tragically against itself, and it can realize larger forms of good. After all, the destruction of a modern empire, or the decay of a modern nation, means more than the captivity of Israel into Babylon, or the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian war: more complex forms of human activity, more many-sided manifestations of the might of the human mind would perish, more sciences, more arts, more state-craft, a more multitudinous life would die.

Now, it is when I take this view of human society—the continuity, growing complexity, reach, power of our citizenship therein, the deepening significance of its purposes and of the momentousness of its choice of the issues of life—that Journalism appears to me to be playing with great stakes.

Its fundamental business, I have said, is to record. It is the bearer of news. It marks the daily footprints of man's history. But it does not record everything. It selects, from day to

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day, amongst the millions of events which take place. You, gentlemen of the press, sift facts and distil meanings; you direct the mind of your times to some things, and, what is not less important, you say nothing of others, and these, as a rule, sink into oblivion, and are not garnered up into the common mind and mood of the nation.

Now it is precisely this matter that gives your mission as Journalists weight. As the influence of the hearth depends from day to day upon the way in which the parents naturally accentuate some things in word and deed, and let others pass away unnoted amongst their ever-watchful children; so is the influence of the daily press upon the national mind. You might fill your pages from day to day with the records of crime, and feed your readers on the refuse of the police courts. You might ignore good causes and great ideas of reform, advocating none of them and expounding none of them when they are weak, but leaving them to gather force as best they may. Instead of guiding you might follow the interests of men, and, in following, not

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always follow the best of them. And if you did this, day by day, I do not think it would be easy to measure the consequences on the national character. But, taking the daily press of this country as a whole, it seems to me that you do much better. You deliberately exclude what you know your subscribers would read ; there are appetites which you will not feed and tastes which you will not pamper. And it is only those who do not consider the solicitations to cheap success that you turn aside who believe that they know your duty better than you do yourselves.

The truth is that in our criticisms of one another we tend to overlook one of the cardinal aspects of duty : we are apt to ignore the medium in which it has to be realized, and to forget what a homely aspect it sometimes wears.

But a man's value cannot be measured merely by the work which he has finished : we must know what obstacles were in his way. It is not the handsomest gentleman, cleanliest in garb and completest in the tale of his members, who has struck the hardest strokes in battle. The

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hero's crest is not always visible above the flood of the fight, and he comes home scarred. Nor is it otherwise in those services of society which, like yours and mine, look peaceful. To appraise a man's services to it we must ask what service he professes to render, and within what material he has been working. The teacher in an elementary school, dunning the multiplication table into little volatile minds, may be doing his duty in a greater way than a professor in a great university amidst his apparatus of research ; and a carpenter may be a better workman at his bench than a politician in the Cabinet.

As you record the daily incidents of the daily life of the world, catching and reporting the first evidence of new phenomena, you may seem to be like artists in clay, working in perishable material. You may seem to compare unfavourably with the historian who depends upon you, and who conceives himself, like Thucydides, to work in marble, and to be preparing for mankind "a possession for ever." But if your work is badly done, he suffers. If your first sifting of the materials of history is unwise or mean—

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record of events which do not matter, of movements which have no mass, and of ideas that will never ripen into deeds—what success can the historian achieve in his more general record of the world's vaster movements, or the philosopher as he distils their ultimate meaning?

In respect to this, the main aspect of your work, as selecting and lifting into view the facts of the current life of the world, I have no criticism to offer, and no suggestions to make. The daily press of this country is standing manfully to a difficult and little appreciated task. And most of the criticisms of it known to me have the grave defect of irrelevance. Your critics forget that you are workers in the rough quarry of the world who release the marble from the rubbish. It is for others, if they can, to convert the blocks you loosen and bring to the surface into forms of beauty.

You write for the many, and you must meet your readers on the level of their own interests. The fulcrum on which you build your engines is in the ordinary world of ordinary men in their ordinary moods. You cannot be prophets with

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one message, or reformers with one mission, or scientific men pursuing for months together one line of research. If, as is not seldom the case, there is evidence of the spirit of the literary artist in your transient pages, or of the originality and comprehensiveness of thought that brings forth, as well as echoes great ideas, you can give full play to neither of these gifts. You are not permitted by the nature of your calling to elaborate your ideas into forms of beauty, or to evolve them into compacted systems of concrete truth.

In this respect you bear the sins of the world, and I know not many sins of the world which are more deadly to those who are called to bear them than its commonplaceness. Taken as a whole we, your readers, are such ordinary men—at least at times. The most silken gentleman wears flannels underneath, and they are nearest his skin; and the high priest is also a forked biped once he has laid aside his sacerdotal robes. And you meet us *as* ordinary men, and in our ordinary moods. You know that we like news, and are born gossips. We are interested in

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facts and events that have no ulterior meaning, and do not want to have "a moral appended" to the story any more than children do. We open our newspapers in the same spirit as our primitive forefathers welcomed the bearer of tales and the traveller from strange lands to the festive board.

And, I confess, that I, for my part, think no less of myself or of my fellows for this trait, nor of you for providing what we ask for. It is a weakness and not a strength, a symptom not of sanity but of neurotic tendencies, to be always on the strain. We cannot walk through life on the high heels of the tragic cothurnus. It is well, if even at the background of our minds the stable interests of humanity have their quiet, dominating, but unobtrusive place. It is an error not to value little things, and to convert everything into means of something else.

If life is a journey and has one goal, in nobility of character, still there are resting-places on the way,—little green oases, where we may slake our thirst and stretch our limbs in the shadow of the palms. We must possess from time to

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time, and know that we possess, as well as pursue ; and we are meant to lay aside a little from day to day our graver cares and to watch in idle mood the scene and the play of events around us. For my part, I do not find that those men are estimable or lovable who do not know that there are some things, and not a few very little things, which are good as they stand, and apart from all the context of consequences. These are the men who are always striving, as the phrase goes, "to get on" ; who, even if they pursue knowledge, are thinking of her uses, and who love virtue "for the sake of temporal success and eternal happiness." But great souls were never merely prudent, and good men are not always calculating. Nor are they either less great or less virtuous because they enjoy "the cakes and ale" that the world provides, and their daily paper.

On all these grounds, and without in the least clothing the function of the journalist as a citizen in false or foreign finery, I must set high value upon it. But, above all, I would have him himself set a high value upon it ; and I fear that



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it is not always easy for him to do so. He knows that if he were only allowed to follow his own taste and consult his own desires, he could produce better work on almost any day in the year. If he is by temperament an artist, he could give his fancies freedom, and watch the play of the winged word with the winged thought. If he is meditative and is visited by great thoughts, he would fain weigh his times in their scales, or follow their hidden working in the recesses of the public mind. If his spirit is that of a prophet and teacher, what would he not give for the stern joy of bearing witness to some great cause and of being for his errant age as a pillar of fire in the night. But the world demands from him another kind of service; and the visions with which he has set out are apt to lose their glory in the grey.

I could imagine that in such circumstances, he may feel that the best that is in him is obstructed. His life seems lost in little things. He is tied down, like Gulliver amongst the Lilliputians, by innumerable and ignominious little threads, and cannot move. Others are

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free to follow the Grail, as artists, philosophers, or preachers of righteousness. They can choose their own subjects, or, better still, let their subjects choose them. They can live always in the presence of their ideal if they desire, and lie

“ In Abraham’s bosom all the year,  
And worship at the Temple’s inner shrine.”

But the shrine seems closed against him, and the light of no Shekinah falls on his labours.

But this were a deep, nay, a fatal error, my friends. The pressmen of this country have a full title to magnify their profession, and to know that joy in the pursuit of their mission which only comes to those who know it to be worthy of their best. Let us look at it a little more closely.

So far I have spoken of your duties of citizenship as if they consisted solely in satisfying the desires of your fellow-men for news. Even so, your task is rooted in the natural needs of men ; and having the nature of things at its back, it has that character which all the greatest things have, of never having been designed or purposed. It has grown with the growing world

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of man ; and now it is one of the most powerful of his engines, for good or for evil.

Have you considered into what a small compass the modern world would sink were it deprived of its daily press, and how the environment of the interests of every individual in the State would contract? That interchange of commodities and commerce of ideas, that rush of resources of every kind where want cries out would cease. We should lapse back into the old parochialism of the days of *The Annals of the Parish*. But my imagination breaks down when I try to picture the modern world without its daily press. Would the business man, unwarned of the movements of the world's economic forces, venture to invest in the dark? What kind of statesmanship could survive, or what kind of democracy, if men could know nothing of one another's moods save what they could learn from what they saw, or hear from their fellows by word of mouth?

It seems to me that amongst the organic filaments which make modern society with its multitudinous life into one whole, we must

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reckon the journalistic press. Without it civilized society, except on rare occasions, would for all practical purposes be disintegrated once more into petty parochial units, and we should have never felt the throb of the larger citizenship. It is owing to you, in great part, that our people is one people and our Empire one Empire. Nay, you bind nation to nation, and involve the fate of one in the fate of all the others. There is no isolation any more, and the scale of every human adventure has changed. If there is war it is like a fire in the heart of a great city; no one knows where the conflagration will stop. I am not sure but that, were you unscrupulous, you could kindle it when you pleased. And, on the other hand, owing to the binding power which you possess, you are able even now to bring together the nations which love peace in its defence, and when the democracy, of which you are the voice, has come to its own, I believe you will yet make wars to cease.

If you say that you are only lookers-on, mere observers taking note and reporting the world's

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ways, still, I would reply, your function and power remain. The press is like the eye, it makes nothing and only sees, and brings the light by which others see ; it initiates no policy, makes no treaties, ratifies none ; it discovers nothing, invents nothing, founds no institutions, sets forth on no enterprise ; it only looks and reports. But what could the hands do without the eye that sees ? And how could modern society, as it stands in the inter-related totality of its interests and the intrinsic interdependence of the elements of its life be, without the daily press, anything better than a blind power, moving in the dark, at once helpless and in constant peril ? Life is now, for every citizen, even for those whose station is very narrow, far too complex to prosper without the press. You are as necessary to modern democracy as is its freedom ; and you are one of its conditions. Without you the discoveries of the scientific thinker and all his inventions would be shorn of the greater part of their use ; the world could neither know its wants nor compel their fulfilment.

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May I point out that in another way you make for the unity of modern social life? You enjoy the rarest of all opportunities for escaping and rebuking Sectionalism. There is no aspect of any public question whose exponents you do not hear. You report all kinds of opinions, and you improve the speeches of all kinds of men. The mantle of your charity is wide, and you hide the nakedness of many a wind-blown rhetorician. Personal indebtedness leads one to magnify this last quality. But when it is considered that you hear all sides of all public questions, and occupy the detached position of observing and reporting, I do not say that you take a conspicuous advantage of your privileged attitude. It is too obvious that, especially as regards political affairs, you "divide" the bread of truth among you, and the slices are wonderfully thin; and you spread them over with your own brand of butter. So far as I know, eye hath not seen and ear hath not heard of a newspaper which is as impartial in its politics as it is in its account of the rise and fall of stocks and shares.

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It would be interesting to search out the causes of this difference. We should find them, I have no doubt, in the character of the public mind to which you minister, and which you interpret with great accuracy. You know that your readers demand truth in your money columns, and that you would not hold them if they knew that always and under all circumstances you said the best of some and the worst of other commercial and industrial ventures. What, then, do they want in political affairs? Is it the corroboration of their own opinions and the substantiation of their own prejudices? If it is the victory of their own political party that they desire, why do they not read the papers of the opposite party so as to ascertain its state of mind and understand its strategy? There is matter for psychical curiosity if not for reflexion here. It may be that political truth is more like medicine than truth in general—"more nasty to take," as George Eliot said, "and sure to disagree," and that it is pure kindness which leads you to give it in homœopathic doses. In any case I cannot praise you,

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nor any one else in this matter ; and I have sometimes feared that while the temperature of political passion is so high as not only to liquefy solid facts but to turn them into gas, the spirit of our citizenship is tepid.

Not being a director of any newspaper, either in the financial or in the editorial sense, I am tempted to call our attitude in this matter crude, and somewhat stupid, and to be grateful that the stupidity seems to be less harmful than might be expected. The very readers whose prejudices you feed deduct a heavy discount from your opinions on political matters. One-sided advocacy always makes converts, but they are converts to the opposite side. Many a politician owes his popularity mainly to those who speak all manner of evil against him ; for mankind is essentially good-natured, and has a touch of chivalry and fair-play in its constitution. We increase the size of the gang of robbers if we call its leader a "Welsh thief" ; and I am not sure that we diminish the ranks of the robbed by calling their chief a "Scotch blockhead"—although I acknowledge that a



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blockhead is a less picturesque leader than a robber—even of hen-roosts.

But there are grave aspects to this matter, as you know well, and weighty responsibilities concerned therewith. The changing fortunes of the political parties cannot weigh in the scales against reverence for the State and respectful trust in those who, even when they err, devote themselves sincerely to its service. They are no benefactors of their age and country who, in whatever station, help the politicians to rob themselves of their good name and the public to expect mean things from them. And one would fain see the daily press exercise more watchfulness and restraint in this matter, and realizing the degree in which the good service of the State depends on the level of the regard of the public for those who serve, secure that none of its columns tarnishes the names of unselfish men and spreads suspicion of their motives.

I am not ignorant, gentlemen, that there are necessities in the situation which you cannot control. The political parties must have their "organs." But I cannot help conjecturing what

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a width of sway and power over men's minds the public press might have were it recognized that it is as impartial in its political as it is in its commercial and industrial attitude.

— You are, in this respect, the guardians of the public well-being. As organs of the social mind on all the matters which concern its citizenship you have a function to fulfil, especially in these times, whose importance it were difficult to exaggerate. You are witnesses to a new aspect of morality, and a new trend in the religious life ; and whether you play your part ill or well, you cannot lay it aside. For morality and religion are now known to be essentially social in their character. Of course they have not ceased to be personal ; the individual is always the focus of his own life, however far abroad he throws its rays. The domestic duties and those of the private station must survive, whatever value is set upon seeking the good of humanity at large. It is no worthy cosmopolitanism which plays fast and loose with the inconspicuous responsibilities of the ordinary daily life.

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But, on the other hand, to a degree which the world has not known before, the private station is invaded by and saturated with the wider interests of the open world. There is hardly an enterprise upon which we can enter, or an undertaking which we can make, but that we must employ the social forces of this wider world as our instrument. You educate your children in the public schools, and public education becomes your personal concern. When they take up their place in the works, or in the office, following any trade or any profession, you find their interests massed with those of others in their own walk of life, and they are members of a class. The interests of every class are abstract, and it is almost a necessity that the views of its members should become one-sided. Society is stratified from top to bottom, and its elements, like those of a machine, are in a permanent condition of strain. And the strain is not destined to pass away, or even to grow less ; for in this sphere, the sphere of economics, every one, however righteous his spirit, must affirm himself, and justice can

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never come except by the higgling of the market.

But, on the other hand, the economic sphere as a whole falls within, is sustained by, and is possible at all only in virtue of a still wider and much higher order. Economic interests are neither the sole nor the ultimate interests of human society. In the State, especially in these times, they are co-ordinated, nay, they are more or less saturated with others. For there is no doubt of the humanitarian motives of the State at present. Whether we consider those ways to be wise or foolish in which it wages war with wrong, or seeks in the midst of its prosperity and commercial greatness to defend the aged poor against want, to foster thrift amongst the working classes, or to provide for better health of mind and body for the generations that are to come, we find in its operations the play of motives which cannot be justly called "economic" or commercial and nothing more.

And the journalism of this country stands for these causes, and is faithful to the ideals

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of citizenship. The sacredness of the State, within which all our interests are mutually sustained, and somehow, in spite of strain and conflicts, held together, stands high in the mind of the press. The press is our witness to the unity of its life and to the value of the causes which have most worth.

It throws its rays in every direction, and on that account tends towards the stability and security as well as for the unity and harmony of the State. No plot against the public good can now ripen in darkness to a perilous magnitude; no excess of opinion or extravagance of purpose goes unrecorded, or fails, on that account, to summon forth its opposite and corrective. Had there been a public press in France, comparable to that which it enjoys to-day, there had been no "Revolution"; for it is the grievance which is dumb that becomes explosive, and the injustice which stalks about with an innocent heart that whips a nation into rage. We owe much of our social peace to the light which the daily press throws upon the general life

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of the people ; and, in the last resort, you are preachers of forbearance and patience and mutual good-will, even when your services are all unconscious.

And when one reflects upon the fewness of the witnesses to the unity of the nation's life, and how impotent these would be without the aid of the press, I do not think you can avoid thinking well of the cause you serve. Without you the reformer of the world's ways were well-nigh helpless, and if you did not nurse good causes when they are weak they could not grow into strength and power. But you give prominence to the efforts of good men who are exponents of quiet issues. There is, for example, nothing to startle the ignorant mind in new movements for education, or in the many pleas for the many forms of charity. But you make room for their advocacy in your sheets, and insinuate the records of the desires and efforts of generous men, devoted to the stable interests of mankind, amongst the accounts of things that are abnormal which most men seek in your pages. And, on the

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whole, while you work upon the common mind, and give it what it wants, *you still keep it on the strain for better things.* It is not possible for you to ignore the medium in which you work, and you could do nothing for mankind if you did not accept the conditions of your service. But, in my opinion, you can magnify your mission. A great trust is laid upon you : and you can go forth on your way conscious that those whose judgment you value most know that you are ranked on the side of the best that is practicable ; and that, surely, for every man is the best of all.

**ARE MORAL AND RELIGIOUS  
BELIEFS CAPABLE OF PROOF?**





## ARE MORAL AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS CAPABLE OF PROOF?

*"And the King said to him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou say nothing but the truth to me in the name of the Lord?"* • 2 CHRONICLES XVIII. 15.

It would be difficult to ask a question which would raise a more unanimous "No!" than that which I have ventured to raise to-night. The answer comes at once, and it comes from all quarters. Believers and scoffers, agreeing in nothing else, are rivals in the emphasis of their denial. "Religion may be true, or it may be false," they will say; "but it is certainly not capable of proof." They would agree with Heine that it had better enter upon no such enterprise. He tells us that from the moment that a religion solicits the aid of philosophy (which is the supreme science of proof) its ruin

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is inevitable. "Religion," he says, "like every absolutism, must not seek to justify itself . . . Personified power must remain mute. The moment that a religion ventures to print a catechism supported by arguments, the moment that a political absolutism publishes an official newspaper, both are near their end." They may do everything except appeal to argument, or assign reasons for their deliverances. To assign reasons is doubly to derogate from their own authority. It is to derive their dicta from a higher source, and to submit them to the judgment of those to whom they are addressed. And if they once appeal to reason, they must thereafter reckon with reason.

Now, so far as regards political absolutism, the appeal to reason has already been made, and its rights have been conceded—at least in principle. Political absolutism in all civilized countries is a thing of the past. The ruler does not claim, and the subject will not acknowledge, unreasoned authority. Political freedom is incompatible with it; and political freedom has been valued so highly by civilized men that

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they have spent centuries in striving for it. They have even risked public order in order to secure it ; although without order freedom itself has no value. It is now claimed that the laws must be made not only for the people but by the people. They can live under no others ; not even if they are good laws. Laws which are too good for a people are only a degree, if at all, less mischievous than laws which are too bad for them. At the best they will be dead. The only effective laws are those which express the nation's will, and these laws, in their succession, mark the stages of its moral and social progress. For every such law is the nation saying "I will." There can be no authority over a free people which is not an authority within the people.

It is acknowledged that the guidance and regulation of a political state is a difficult task. The conditions of social and political welfare are very complex. The sequence of causes and effects is difficult to trace, and the chain of antecedents runs back into the intricate depths of human nature. And, on the other hand, it

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is admitted that the minds of the people are shallow and their ignorance of these things very great. Nevertheless, the people does not abate its claim to self-government. Edmund Burke thought that the people are not answerable for their political opinions. "God and nature," he said, "never made them to think or act without guidance and direction. It is the statesman's primary function to instruct the people to discern and pursue their own highest interests."

But the spirit of democracy has waxed stronger since the days of Burke, generous as were his thoughts on statesmanship. Though we may still admit that the people need guidance and direction, and may still demand that the statesman should think with them and for them, we do not expect him, and will not allow him, to think instead of them. "God and nature," we believe now, have made the people of the same stuff as their legislators. Political wisdom may be declared from above, but it must be elicited from all quarters. The legislator may help the people to know their own best mind; but he cannot forestall it in his

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enactments. He is the recorder of a nation's convictions; he carries out its volitions; and he ceases to rule the movement he fails, to persuade.

Now, this, in principle, is what is meant when it is said that "Democracy has come." It is the claim of the people, acknowledged and conceded, to the right of private judgment in the affairs of the State. It is the assumption on the part of the individual citizen of responsibility for the welfare of his country. We reckon it as the greatest achievement of human history to have given the ordinary citizen this right, and to have imposed upon him this duty. For although we may hesitate as to possibility of realizing the democratic ideal, we do not deny its value. It is one of the things which people sometimes speak of as being "too good to be true." For, in principle, the coming of democracy is the coming of freedom. The old absolutism being dethroned, and the general will being entrusted with its powers, the people becomes a sovereign people and is guided by its own conceptions of public welfare.

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And now, a most interesting and important question arises. Will the spirit of democracy, now that it has arrived, confine its claims to the political domain? Or will it seek to extend its right of private judgment to other matters? Having repudiated unreasoning authority in affairs of the State, will it be docile in those of morals and religion? Can dogmatism in theology survive despotism in politics? Or will the people demand that the elements of their religious faith shall be submitted to their judgment and satisfy their reason, even as they do in the affairs of citizenship?

Observing the signs of the times as best I can, I can conceive only one answer to these questions. The spirit of democracy, now that it is awake, will not be confined. The people has placed its lips to the cup of liberty, and it will drink deep. Moreover, it is of the very essence of every spiritual principle that it shall universalize itself. Whether it be intellectual, moral, political or religious it will tend to possess the whole man. Men cannot be free or virtuous in spots. The lover of truth tends to love all

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truth, and of goodness all goodness ; and error and vice like a disease will corrupt the whole man. And, as a matter of fact, there is no better test of truth and goodness, on the one hand, and of error and evil on the other, than that the former can, and the latter cannot be universalized without contradiction and conflict. Truths harmonize, errors clash. Good men supplement one another, and the wise are sustained by the wisdom of their fellows. But evil leads to division and disorder and conflict and anarchy.

I cannot doubt, therefore, that, whether it be for good or for evil, the people of this country, having demanded and in a measure secured, that they shall be legislators as well as subjects in the affairs of the State, must make the same demand throughout the whole domain of their spiritual interests. Indeed, morality *begins* in such a demand. The moral agent is the man who is responsible for his own deeds. The most crude and elementary action, if it is to be called moral or immoral, is an action which the individual has of himself chosen to perform. It is his own ; it expresses his own desire ; it is



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the result of his right or wrong judgment. It has a dignity if it is good, and it carries with it a degradation if it is bad, which no action can have that has been forced upon the agent by an alien and external power. Indeed, morality knows no coercion. It is not possible to compel goodness; it is a matter of choice. The moral agent approves the laws which he obeys, and obeys the laws which he approves. Any violation of his right to act according to the dictates of his own conscience, as we say, which are the dictates of his own personality, is a violation of his manhood, and deprives him at once both of his responsibility and his sovereignty. Moral action is essentially a matter of private judgment.

But does the same truth hold with regard to religion? What is the meaning of our otiose mental attitude in regard to religious truths? Can it be that, while man must walk in the light of his own conscience when he chooses between right and wrong, and must take upon himself the whole responsibility of his actions, he may allow an authority which is external to

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him to dictate, without the serious exercise of his own judgment, those religious beliefs in which dwell the ultimate strength and inspiration of his life? Do his right and duty of private judgment lapse on the threshold of the sphere where the most sacred and the most potent of all the forces which move and direct mankind are active?

The answers we receive to these questions are confused and hesitating, and this I regard as the greatest religious tragedy of the time. For the questions are not seriously asked. The spirit of liberty, confident of itself everywhere else, has been reluctant and slow to assert itself in the domain of religion. Religion, we are told, is the sense of infinite dependence. It obeys without question; it trusts where knowledge fails, and when reason is silent; and it clothes itself with humility as with a garment. We are acquainted with its language:

“ Behold, we know not anything ;  
I can but trust that good shall fall  
At last, far off, at last to all,  
And every winter change to spring.

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I falter where I firmly trod ;  
And, falling with my weight of cares  
Upon the great world's altar stairs  
That slope, through darkness, up to God,  
I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope  
And gather dust and chaff, and call  
To what I feel is Lord of all,  
And faintly trust the larger hope."

What can reason, it is asked, do in this region ?  
Does it not engender rather than silence doubt ?  
What burden has reason ever made more light,  
or what grief has it assuaged, as it brings forth  
its arguments on this side and that and balances  
proof and disproof ? The religious spirit, we  
are told, has another and better resource than  
reason.

"Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,  
Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and  
woe ;  
But God has a few of us whom He whispers in the ear :  
The rest may reason and welcome ; 'tis we, musicians,  
know."

Such is the language of religious persons, and I  
speak of it with reverence. But let us examine it.

Now, I would not for one moment obscure  
or qualify, and far less would I deny, that in

this full trust and secure faith lies the very essence of religion. Out of this trust in God grows all the strength and all the spiritual splendour of His servants. It is always present in the spirit which is in truth religious. It burns like a fire on a quiet hearth in the soul of the simple, who can give no account of it; it breaks out like a pure flame amidst the darkest superstitions. It maintains itself amidst the difficulties of baffled and doubting minds, lending poignancy to their pain. Nay, this trust appears, chastened and much more prone to silence than to take the song of victory on its lips, in the inconclusive systems of great philosophers. And it may be that this stricken faith is, after all, neither the least ample, nor the least secure; for even if it is hurt well-nigh to death by the assaults of doubt, it has, nevertheless, challenged and fought the enemy in the open field.

I cannot, then, speak ambiguously of this matter of faith and religious trust. Faith, trust in God, is the beginning and the end, the timid bud and the full-blown flower of

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religion ; and to those who value true religion, regarding it as the supreme human good, there can be only one question of the first importance, and that question is : How can that faith, that trust in God, be maintained? Is it against reason? Is it without regard to reason? Can reason give it no support? Is reason, the most unique of man's endowments, the marked and signal gift of what some call "Nature" and others "God"—is this gift of reason, which man does well to exercise to the best of his power in all the minor affairs of life, of no avail in the domain of religion? We believe that reason is powerful to attack ; is it useless for defence? We admit that it can call forth doubts ; must we admit that it is helpless to allay them? Has it only a negative function? Are all its potencies destructive? I should like at the very least to induce you to raise this question ; for I am persuaded that you yield the opponents of religion far too much, perhaps even the central fortress, if you allow to them, and deny yourselves, the help of the formidable forces of

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reason. Rationalism was a term of abuse in the past as Intellectualism is a term of opprobrium in the present. Why? Are we to take it for granted that the cold eye of the intellect, the impartial scrutiny of reason, when turned upon religion, can find therein nothing but a series of beliefs that will not bear examination?

You say that religion is a matter of feeling, or of the heart and not of reason—as if a man ever thought or acted in parts. Do you trust the testimony of feeling in any other serious matter? Will your *feeling* that a man is guilty or innocent convince either judge or jury in any court of law? Ought it to convince yourselves? Feeling has its own place in human life, and a very great place and function it is, and I am not derogating from its value; but it is not the place of feeling, not even of love, to judge between truth and error, to give or to weigh evidence. Feelings, such as love or hate, express the value set upon objects by an individual, but they are not trustworthy witnesses as to their intrinsic worth. Love gilds its objects; hate smirches them. “A poor thing,”

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says Touchstone—and that, by the way, was an unusually good exercise of judgment—"but mine own": a touch of fondness made all the difference. Feeling is not a witness for truth. The function of feeling with regard to truth is that it impels men to seek for it. We approve of the enthusiastic man of science as he explains nature, and we approve of the emotional ardour of the social reformer who loves mankind. Yea, we know that nothing great was ever done without passion, and that nothing has performed noble services for mankind except love.

But we do not want the scientific man's passion to determine his views on the laws of physics; nor do we want his feeling to determine his opinions on the facts of chemistry. Nor, on the other hand, can we trust the social reformer to be led by his feelings, whether in describing the evils of his time, or in prescribing legislative remedies. We demand dispassionate research in these fields. We trust only the cold light of the critical intelligence, and we demand that it shall bring into

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the field every instrument which it possesses for testing and criticizing. If it is the sublime feeling of love of truth which must lead men to inquire, it is the intellect and not feeling which bears witness to the facts.

Now we admit all this in regard to the region of secular life. We believe that the realm of nature is the realm of order, and that even the more complex and confused domain of social life has its own unfailing laws according to which alone it can prosper. The principles which sustain both the physical and moral orders are, we believe, rational; and, therefore, the more the intelligence inquires into them and the better it discovers the facts as they stand, the more clearly and gloriously their rational nature will be revealed.

Why, then, is it otherwise in regard to religion? How is it that while research must be unbiased, and emotion and feeling must be silent in every other field, the face of reason when it inquires into religion must be flushed with passion, and feeling must throw its sword into the balance? Will religion not sustain



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close inquiry? Can it be that those who put the matters of faith above, or below, or beyond the reach of reason are afraid of its verdict? When Nathanael asked, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth"? Philip's answer was "Come and see." When will the Church of Christ so trust its own cause as to rise to the same height of daring, and, like Philip, call upon those who doubt, simply to "Come and see"?

I believe with all my heart, and I have believed it for years, and I believe it more strongly the longer I live, that they serve the Church of Christ ill who deny the competence of man's reason to deal with matters of faith. They create distrust in the very truths they would maintain. The days of dogmatism are numbered in religion, even as the days of despotism are past in civil government; and it is time that the Church should take a stronger stand. The laws which men will obey, the truths which they can accept, must approve themselves to their own judgment, for the spirit of the times is setting on one side the

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fetters which bound it in the past. "The present age," said Kant, "may be characterized as the age of criticism, a criticism to which everything is obliged to submit. Religion, on the ground of its sacredness, and Law, on the ground of its majesty, not uncommonly attempt to escape this necessity; but by such efforts they inevitably awaken a just suspicion of the soundness of their foundation, and they lose all their claim to the unfeigned homage which is paid by reason to that which has shown itself able to stand the test of free inquiry."

I am aware, of course, that the powers of the intelligence are limited, and that reason misleads. Men take truth for error and error for truth, even as they take good for evil and evil for good. But if you had to set aside your faculties because they fail now and then, how many of them would remain? Except in matters of religion, would you not advise mankind to use the powers of reason as best they can, and admit that by their use alone could they find what truth they know or do such good as they perform? I am aware

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that we have absolute knowledge of nothing : not the least fact in the outer world do we know to the heart, nor the least movement of our own souls do we fully comprehend. You will be ultimately puzzled by anything you take in hand. To know the flower in the crannied wall were to know everything. But though we know only in part, is not such knowledge as we have a possession beyond price? Or shall we try to reverse the movement of history and bring back the age of the cave-men and lake-dwellers, on the ground that reason has frequently misled us?

I admit that the matters of religion are great, and surpass the compass of our mind. But that is true about every fact. Even time with its evanescent affairs, like the sky, dips below our horizon. But although it is only a small portion of the spiritual heavens that is visible above our heads, it is better that we should look ; for the portion which we can see may suggest the beyond and give us a clue to its nature. If not at the dawn of our clouded life, then perhaps in the evening of the dutiful

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service of the true and the good, when the sun is dipping out of sight, we shall see some of the fixed stars and know the vaster depths of the silent heaven. There is no doubt that whatever is in store for us, if it is to have meaning and worth for us, will be such as can be continuous with our present experience.

I would plead most earnestly with those who would strengthen the appeal of religion to the liberated mind of the present age that they take towards it the same attitude as towards the other great interests of life; that they give to authority, tradition, feeling on the one side, and to the understanding and reason on the other, the same place. Such is my faith in the truth of religion that I believe its fundamental facts are not only capable of proof, but of the same kind of proof as that which we employ in the most secure of the natural sciences. Indeed there is, in the last resort, only one way of proving a truth, as there is only one way of knowing objects.

But, you will ask, do not religious problems differ in their nature from other problems?

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The history of natural knowledge shows that problems which are finally insoluble in one age are solved by its successor : research discovers new facts, the scientific imagination lights upon some new hypothesis, there is a change of method. But the problems of religion are not only unanswered but by their very nature unanswerable ; and progress in this region is impossible.

This objection touches deep issues, which cannot be adequately discussed to-night. But I will make bold to say that there are no problems which reason is entitled to ask that do not lie within the power of reason to solve ; and that in this respect the domain of our religious life does not differ from that of our secular life. Indeed, the distinction of religious and secular is itself unjustifiable ; for the religious life is nothing but *the secular life devoted to the Best we know*.

There are not only unsolved but insoluble questions in every department of human knowledge. No physicist will ever invent a perpetually moving machine : no mathematician

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will ever prove that  $2 \times 2 = 15$  : or will be able to answer such a problem as was once set to me by a group of puzzled old ladies : " If a bottle and cork cost ninepence, how much will the cork cost ? " The terms of the first problems are self-contradictory, and of the last are not fully given. But such problems as these make illegitimate demands upon reason ; they are themselves irrational, and reason puts them on one side.

Now, I am persuaded that some of the so-called problems of religion are problems of this kind. They are set in such a way that no one can, and no one ought to be able to answer them. They should be set aside as absurd ; for either their premisses have been so narrowed down that they cannot bear the conclusion we seek ; or they involve some contradiction which can yield only a self-stultifying result. No better example of such problems could be desired than Herbert Spencer furnished in his conception of an Unknowable God. And there are other conceptions of God such that the proof of His existence, were it possible, would be a disaster.

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What recourse have we in such cases? Evidently it is to examine the premisses of our problem, lest some folly or fallacy should lurk within them. But we are always slow to suspect the truth of our own prejudices ; and theologians and philosophers have preferred the easier method of laying the blame, not upon themselves, but on the very faculty of reason. Even yet we are only just emerging from a period when the premisses for the proof of God were confined between the two boards of a Book. Nature was definitely represented as secular during the Middle Ages. The only revelation of God was the record of the religious experiences of one nation. I am not disposed by one word to deny or speak ambiguously of the Bible as a veritable revelation, but I cannot admit that it is the only revelation. I cannot even admit that it is the only sacred and inspired literature. God has not been so niggard of the truth.

And beside the evidence of God which is found in the Bible, I see spread around us the world of Nature ruled by law, sublime in its

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order and saturated with beauty; and I know that when sorrow is hard to bear, the beauty of nature has a healing in it beyond all else, because it suggests; and I believe we do injustice to nature itself when we omit its suggestiveness. Beside its beauty, beside the sublimity of its order, the natural world, the world of matter, the world of space and time, is the condition and instrument of man's moral and spiritual life. In its relation to man nature has a definitely spiritual function. It presents him with the opportunity of forming his character. It is the condition of his moral life; it is the partner of all his enterprises, moral and intellectual. What could we know without it? What could we believe without it? It is not our opponent; it is our helpmate unto God. It is not secular; it is freighted full of spiritual meaning.

Let us turn in another direction. Extended back through the wide expanse of time there is the invisible world of man's thought and volitions, compacted together by the interrelation of will and will, of personality and



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personality—the real world of man's mind, the real world of man. There, if we look well, are also laws of an immutable order; laws which nations cannot violate and prosper, and cannot reverence without reward, yea, without gaining the highest of all rewards, namely, the reward of becoming good by doing good. Now, I ask, may not reason look for evidence here also? Is it not possible that in order to explain the existence of this spiritual order we may need the hypothesis of God? And is it not possible that that hypothesis of God is, after all, the sanest, the likeliest to prove true, the best substantiated of all that have been propounded? But the Deism that is now passing away precluded us from the use of any such hypothesis; for God was defined not as infinite but as that which is *not*-finite. God is not here, it was said; God is beyond—beyond everything we know. He is outside of His universe. He is in the region of the unknown; in the emptiness beyond. He does not declare Himself in nature nor in history. And having defined Him negatively as against the finite, we naturally, nay

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inevitably, pronounce Him to be unknown. Of course, if thus conceived, He is unknown and unknowable; the very hypothesis places Him beyond the knowable. Then we condemn reason for not being able to know what we have just defined as unknowable.

Now, however, owing in part to our great poets, who are also our greatest philosophers, such as Wordsworth, Browning and Tennyson, owing to Goethe and the great philosophical idealists, we are revising our view of God; we are feeling our way towards the conception of God as immanent in nature and in the mind of man. We are admitting the natural and moral universe into the witness-box to strengthen the testimony of the sacred Book; and once more we are venturing to say that "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork."

It seems to me that our most recent theology in doing this is simply rising to the demands that the religious spirit has always made. For, of course, the task of theology is only to interpret religion, to explain man's relation to his God;

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and theology is as different from religion itself as astronomy from the stars. The starry system is a fact; astronomy is the attempt at the explanation of it. Religion is also a fact, the living force in history; theology is the explanation of that fact, or the attempted explanation. Now the religious spirit always gives genuine significance to the notion that God is omnipresent; for the trustful spirit finds God everywhere. Yea, it finds God in the midst of the sorrows and the disasters of life, even amongst the tragedies of sin. And when theology arises to the dignity of its task it also will seek God everywhere. If it does not it is not faithful to the subject which it is its problem to explain.

But in the next place, before we condemn reason, or exclude reason from the service of religion, it is well that we should ask if it is not possible that we have not only been misinterpreting the nature of God but also misunderstanding the nature of proof. Of course, we know all about *that*, some of you may say. Well, I am not sure. What is proof? What is the way in which the natural sciences demon-

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strate their truths? "Oh!" the answer will be, "they begin with some sure foundation, they start from some truth that nobody can doubt. That truth is axiomatic. It is intuitive. It is one of the principles of common sense. Proof always has some sound foundation. Having found something firm to stand upon, we then proceed to build upon that foundation the edifice of our knowledge. We connect our other beliefs with it by means of reasons. And if we can connect all our opinions with that original, certain foundation, then the whole edifice of our knowledge stands secure." That is the general view of proof, is it not?

Philosophers themselves have been seeking for such a foundation. They have often deemed that they have got it. For instance, Descartes said that he had found it in his *Cogito, ergo sum*—"I think, therefore I am." And apparently none could deny that, because the very denial is to think. It looks quite certain. But the next philosopher who came found that it contained pre-suppositions; that that final fundamental truth implied things taken for granted.

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The “I,” the “think,” the “am,” the conception of “self”; the idea of “thought”; the conception of “existence”; the “because”—there is not a single element in that supposed fundamental truth which will not be found by any thinker to contain unexamined pre-suppositions. And it is always so; the final truth is found in every instance to rest upon something else. When we examine it, it depends upon something further, and so on without end. What, then, must be done? Oh! we will do as we always do—we philosophers—we will make charges against human reason, and mankind will follow our example. But this condemnation of reason, if it were not tragic, would be amusing. You really might think that men had made their own reason; that it is not the gift of God at all, but something made in Birmingham. .

For what do we hear about reason? It is said—“Reason is discursive; reason is relative; it cannot find a first cause of anything, but every cause when we come to it is found to be the effect of something else, and that of something else, and that of something else again, without

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end. The chain of reason hangs in mid-air. Reason is a deceptive instrument, or at least it is inconclusive." But I would ask once more whether, when we thus condemn reason, we are not condemning it for not doing an impossible thing or for not answering an unanswerable question. For it is possible that knowledge has not got a foundation. It is possible that a foundation cannot be found, for the very simple reason that none exists. The metaphor of foundation, like many another metaphor in the history of thought, may be leading us by the nose.

It is certain that there are things which have no foundation, and uncommonly stable things, too. The planetary system, for instance, has no foundation. We have given up the idea that the world rests upon an elephant, and the elephant upon a tortoise. The planetary system, we believe, is an equipoise of worlds which sustain one another. No planet in the system, not even the sun, can be called the foundation: the metaphor is inappropriate. And yet the whole is so stable and so compacted together

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that the removal of any one of the planets out of the system would destroy the equilibrium of the whole, and bring it down in ruin.

Now, may not truth have the same character? It is possible that it, too, is a system of mutually sustaining elements; and that the more perfect is the system, the less discrete, the less sporadic, the less disconnected it is. There are degrees of proof. Proofs are not all of the same value, and the strength of a proof depends upon the coherence and the comprehensiveness of the elements which it contains. It is essential that the truth or the opinion which is in question should be a part of a system, and the proof of it consists in showing that to deny it is to destroy the system itself, and ultimately the possibility of experience.

For instance, if we deny the physicist—and Physics, of course, is the greatest of the sciences—that action and re-action are equal and opposite, how much of his Physics would remain? Deny again, that attraction varies inversely as the square of the distance, and how much of modern Astronomy would remain? One genuine

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exception to any law breaks up the whole of a science. Truth is a system of inter-related elements in which every part sustains every other part, and proof consists in placing a fact within a system, and showing that it is vital to that system. The final proof of a fact is to show that the denial of it would abolish rational experience.

To prove the truths of religion, we must follow an analogous method. We have to ask whether we can do without them; whether, for instance, we can do without the idea of God; whether nature and spirit are explicable without that conception. "But the idea of God," you will answer, "is only a hypothesis on that showing." Well, I ask again, what is a hypothesis? What is it in the case of the natural sciences? For I presume that it would be an incalculable satisfaction to us to believe that the principles of our religion could be proved in the open field in the same way as the principles of the sciences. There is not one of the sciences which is not called into being by its hypothesis. You have no science until you gather your facts



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together under a hypothesis, you have only a miscellaneous collection of ideas. It is the hypothesis which first and provisionally orders the facts, and the whole of a science is at once both a testing and an establishing of the hypothesis. A hypothesis is at the same time a guess, and also an assurance of all the truths of a science. If, for instance, we refuse to modern biology the idea of development, on the ground that it is only a hypothesis, we condemn the biologist to begin his work all over again.

Nevertheless, the scientific man will allow that his hypothesis or regulative conceptions are only forecasts of possible truth, whose meaning is even to himself imperfectly known. The physicist speaks of matter, but he does not know very well what it is, and he admits that he does not. Space is a hypothesis ; so is energy ; so is time ; so is motion. You will find the scientific man at the end of the science trying to explain what is meant by these things which he has assumed at the beginning. But he will also say, " I admit that these are only hypotheses, but if

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you will lend to me these conceptions, insecure and imperfectly comprehended as they are at the first, if you will allow me to apply them to facts, try them by facts, I will bring order and rationality into the physical world. I will build a science which is progressive in its security, and which will in turn issue in inventions and bring the powers of nature to the service of man."

The same thing is true with regard to the uniformity of nature. The uniformity of nature is only a hypothesis. It is only a hypothesis that nothing occurs without its cause, and that, when the cause is present, the effect must inevitably follow. The hypothesis may even seem to be contradicted on all hands. There are events which look like accidents, mere contingencies; but in spite of them we hold by the hypothesis of the uniformity of nature, and we say that accident is only a name for that which we have not explained. The cause of the apparent accident exists if we only could find it. That is to say, we believe in the uniformity of nature, and science is gradually proving its truth, little by little. The proof of the hypothesis

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in the sense of its application to individual facts is never complete. It will not be complete until the last cause has been followed to its effect and the last effect assigned to its cause. It cannot be completely proved until the whole of nature is explained in every detail. That is to say, it will never be completed in that sense.

Thus, the principle of the uniformity of nature is only a hypothesis. But it is the surest of all physical hypotheses. It is proved by all the natural experience that we have, because experience itself would be impossible without it. If nature were not uniform, we could not trust our own thoughts, nor would we dare to act: anything might, or might not, follow from anything. Why, the smallest child assumes the principle of the uniformity of nature, although he does not know in the least what is meant by either "uniformity" or "nature." The little child has a bad fall when he is just beginning to walk, and the mother will say, "we can't induce him to try again." He acts on the pre-supposition that the same antecedents will bring the same consequences.

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Now, as the "Uniformity of Nature" though only a hypothesis, is the condition of our knowledge of physical facts and events, so also, I believe, is the conception of God the ultimate condition of all rational experience whatsoever. And when I speak of the "hypothesis" of God, this is what I mean. It is the idea without which neither nature nor spirit is either possible or explicable. To understand them is to regard them *sub specie æternitatis*, that is, in their reference to the Absolute Being: and if that is the case, then every new advance in knowledge, as well as every new stage in man's moral progress is a new verification of the hypothesis. Civilization itself would, from this point of view, be in the last resort only the progressive proof of the existence and nature of God: and the knowledge of God being thus substantiated were the most secure of all knowledge.

Thus, then, it seems to me that the methods of science are applicable in the domain of religion, and that we do not need to have recourse to the treacherous subterfuge of denying the competence of reason. Such is my faith

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in rational religion, that though tested by fire, none of it will be consumed except the stubble. Portions of our temporary little creeds may have to disappear when we bring honest thinking to bear upon them; but I believe with all my heart that religion, yea, the Christian religion in its essence, is rational through and through; and I want the Church to take a stronger stand.











